

**ACADIA Academy Review Team Report and Recommendation**  
**by**  
**Chair Nichi Farnham, Laurie Pendleton, and Shelley Reed.**

The Review Team was assisted by Maine Department of Education Peg Armstrong-Special Education, Susan Reed- Early Childhood Education, and Maine Charter School Commission Executive Director Bob Kautz.

**A. Education Plan – Mission, Vision, Targeted Student Population; Academic Program; Special Student Population; Assessment; School Climate; and Discipline**

**Strengths**

1. The application presented a desire to educate the whole child academically, behaviorally, socially, emotionally and physically.
2. The proposal recognized the needs of students from the Lewiston-Auburn area with a focus on low socio-economic, special education, English Language Learner (ELL), and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) involved children.
3. The academic program is based on a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach and the behavioral component is based on Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions (PBSI). Both of these approaches are being implemented in many schools.

**Questions, Concerns**

1. The selected curricula relies heavily on direct instruction which may not meet the needs of all learning and teaching styles.
2. The design of the academic program appears to be specifically targeted to students with academic challenges, which raises questions about the program's ability to serve all students as described in the school mission statement.
3. Although the application referenced the use of Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) along with other progress monitoring systems, the description of student evaluation was solely based on the use of a Common Core checklist.
4. The application did not describe expected student performance and did not set benchmarks for student performance. When questioned, the development team suggested they would set a target of 80% of students or more making gains.
5. The Pre-K program is not based on an integrated curriculum.
6. The applicant did not articulate a clear vision for the charter school in 5-10 years.
7. The application did not discuss any elements of the curriculum design that were described as innovative.
8. According to the application, co-curricular and extra curricula activities are to be met by providing parents with area opportunities, which does not allow for charter school created options.

9. It is highly probable that the school's relationship with the Margaret Murphy Center for Children (MMCC) would lead to a much higher special education population than estimated. Because of this relationship, there is concern that the school would not be able to provide the least restrictive environment for special education students.
10. The proposed staffing ratios may not meet the needs of students. For example the narrative states that an aide will be in every classroom, yet the budget shows five classrooms and three aides in year one.
11. Although key components of the school's programming, the application lacks information regarding the development of Individualized Learning Plans for students who are not identified as requiring special education services.
12. The application lacked a complete description of the "Choice Study Units" which occupy 20% of the school week.
13. The application lacks a clear discipline policy and fails to outline procedures that will be taken when students' behavior is not handled through intrinsic motivation or PBSI. The procedures for the removal of students, if necessary, were not present.
14. The application does not discuss how the school will collect data, beyond student performance, that will help inform curriculum decisions, improve school culture, and track and increase parent involvement.
15. The emergency procedures and handbooks included in the application are not specific to ACADIA Academy.
16. The application failed to describe meaningful ways to engage parents beyond the traditional methods of student conferences and Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO).
17. The proposal does not fully describe the school's approach to Social Studies.

### **Education Plan Summary**

Is the Education Plan compelling?

- Although ACADIA Academy seems to be aiming its student population target as low income, challenging backgrounds, and second language learners, it states that it seeks a diverse group of learners which should also include students who are not at academic or social risk. The mission and vision seem to contradict the elements of the curricula and design of the charter school.
- The school design is not particularly innovative, as combining elements of existing programs does not seem innovative or compelling.

Am I convinced that the applicant makes a strong case for the quality of the program?

- The design of the academic program appears to be specifically targeted to students with academic challenges, which raises questions about the program's ability to serve all students as described in the school mission statement.

- The program is dependent on packaged curriculum and a structured approach to student learning which may impede some students from meeting their full potential.
- The school did not describe how it would use assessment information to modify the educational program and improve instruction, student learning and staff development.
- The application did not present a coherent vision of what the school would look like in 5-10 years if it is achieving its mission.
- The application did not present a viable plan for curriculum development of the core academic areas consistent with the school's mission, values and education program design.

Does the Education Plan support the vision and mission of the school?

- The program fails to describe how it will promote student collaboration while supporting students in developing their maximum potential.
- The program lacks connection to the expressed Guiding Principles of the Maine Learning Results/Common Core.
- The mission and vision of the school to meet the needs of diverse learners seems contradictory to the selected academic approach and selected curriculum.

**B. Organizational and Operational Plan – School Calendar and Daily Schedule; Student Recruitment and Enrollment; Staffing and Human Resources; Pre-Opening Plan; Management Operations; Parent and Community Involvement**

**Strengths**

1. The calendar included an offering of extended learning opportunities in the month of August on a student voluntary basis to reduce summer learning loss.

**Questions, Concerns**

1. The proposal does not present a comprehensive student recruitment and marketing plan that will ensure a diverse population that goes beyond families who already have a strong connection to MMCC.
2. The current teacher evaluation plan is undeveloped and would not necessarily help to correct negative or mediocre practice. The proposed teacher evaluation plan does not meet the required state teacher evaluation measures.
3. ACADIA Academy expects that several, if not all staff, will be selected from internal candidates from MMCC. This practice may limit the skill set of the staff and reduce the opportunity to build a well-rounded teaching staff.
4. The pre-opening plan lacks details that should have identified responsible individuals.
5. The startup plan lacks the necessary details to ensure the work would get done.

6. The proposed designated leader of the school is also responsible for additional programs and would not be focused primarily on the charter school. This brings up concerns about the availability of the school leader to work with the parents, the community, the teachers, and the other staff.
7. The staff employee policy identifies teachers as hourly, not salaried, employees with a 30-hour a week regarded as a full time employee, noting emergency call back hourly time.
8. The staff employee policy also referenced merit based pay with no narrative about how this pay would be determined.
9. The plan did not present a vision and strategy for community involvement that is reasonably likely to further the school's mission and program.
10. The parent involvement described in pre-and post-opening section is limited to participation in a Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and volunteering.
11. The parent on the Governing Board is a non-voting member.
12. The applicant did not provide evidence of community resources independent from MMCC.
13. The applicant did not clearly describe the mutual benefits of having access to the MMCC resources.

### **Organizational and Operational Plan Summary**

Does the school have an effective plan to recruit, retain and grow an outstanding staff?

- The proposal does not include a plan to recruit a teaching staff with experience to meet the diverse needs of students
- The plan contains no evidence of a teacher evaluation plan that meets the state evaluation plan to promote growth.

Does the Management and Operation Plan support the vision and mission of the school?

- The leadership of the proposed charter school does not present an understanding of the roles and responsibilities; focus, and priorities needed to independently manage a public school, including the federal/state compliance and financial management concerns as it applies to a public charter school.
- The proposal represents a lack of an understanding of the alignment of staffing and budget to mission and vision, and a plan for successful implementation.

### **C. Governance – Governing Body, Governing Board Composition**

#### **Strengths**

1. The ACADIA Academy has filed for Maine nonprofit status.

2. The Governing Board makeup shows clinicians and teachers with experience to oversee the chosen curriculum.

### **Questions, Concerns**

1. The proposal did not contain a clear plan for the Board to review and evaluate the success of the school and the school leaders or identify the data to be used in making evaluative determinations.
2. The plan did not provide evidence of a Governing Board that functions independently of the John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. as stipulated in the applicant instructions.
3. The parent member of the Governing Board would not have voting rights.
4. No community person has yet been identified for the Governing Board.
5. Given the current lack of expertise in the area of management of public and private funds, we question whether the Board has the capacity to oversee the financial management of the school.
6. The Board currently lacks a diverse skill set to independently govern all aspects of the charter school.
7. The proposed director for the ACADIA Academy currently is the director of the Margaret Murphy Center for Children (MMCC). With this role and a leadership role in other facilities, limited time and focus would be available to be spent on the new charter school.

### **Governance Summary**

Are we convinced that the Board members and the Executive Leadership have the skills, background and understanding of their roles necessary to make this a viable and sustainable charter school?

- The job descriptions of the Director and Assistant Director are not clearly defined leaving little guidance or specificity of the roles and responsibilities for these key school leadership positions.
- The current Board makeup of clinicians and teachers does not provide skills in finances and legal knowledge. ACADIA Academy becomes dependent on John F. Murphy Homes Inc. for these skill sets making for a Board that does not look like an independent entity.

Does the Governance Plan support the vision and the mission of the school?

- ACADIA Academy is entwined with MMCC and John F. Murphy Homes Inc. they are dependent on them for leadership, staff, professional development, legal, and financial expertise. Thus there is not an independent support system in place for their vision and mission.

**D. Business and Financial Services – Budget, Financial Management, Facilities, Transportation, Insurance, Food Service, Closure Protocol**

**Strengths**

1. John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. has agreed to provide \$60,000 in startup funds. There was no mention of arrangements for pay back in the narrative, but in the interview session a representative from John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. replied it would not expect to be paid back.
2. The school will be contracting with John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. for financial services.
3. ACADIA Academy expects to have a two-month cash reserve by year three of operation.
4. The applicant presented their desired facility requirements which include: classrooms, multi-purpose, library, teacher workspace, offices, and outdoor space.
5. Regarding transportation, the applicant plans to use multiple pick up spots in the Lewiston-Auburn area and plans to share costs with MMCC.

**Questions, Concerns**

1. The school is reliant on John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. to provide fiscal knowledge, thereby the application did not present evidence that the school's leadership has a strong understanding of the appropriate delineation of roles and responsibilities among the governing board and administration regarding school finance.
2. The proposal did not clearly define how the school would ensure financial transparency.
3. The budget does not allow for the implementation of an innovative curriculum beyond the programs already determined.
4. Regarding a location for the school, the Governing Board has not yet decided on whether to lease, buy, or build a site.
5. The charter school will be relying on John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. for sound financial policies and processes for accounting, purchasing, payroll, internal controls, and insurance.
6. The proposal provided no evidence that the school, independent of John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. has adequate policies and processes for tracking enrollment and attendance eligibility; eligibility for free and reduced priced lunch; and students eligible for participation in other federal and state programs.
7. Although the applicant is relying on John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. for software and accounting systems there is no contract in the application to provide evidence that it is appropriate for use in public charter schools and users are fully trained.
8. The application lacked evidence to support facilities-related budget assumptions.
9. The application did not provide specific details regarding third party relationships.
10. The school does not plan to provide lunch in year one for students not eligible for free/reduced lunch.

11. The application was unclear about how their plans to use the Good Shepherd Food Bank to provide lunch resources for students eligible for free /reduced lunch would meet the requirements for the Federal School Lunch Program.
12. Plans for transportation for students with disabilities were not present in the application.
13. The application did not describe transportation options for students outside the catchment area.
14. Evidence of insurance, surety bond for CFO, or equipment specific to ACADIA Academy as a separate entity was not provided in the application.
15. The placement plan in case of closure was inadequate; as it just included providing parents with a list of private and public schools, and enrollment information.
16. The closure protocol that would allow an orderly transition was inadequate; it spoke only to staff creating a system of student, financial, and asset records.

### **Business and Financial Services Summary**

Are we convinced that the applicant has operating capital adequate to open the school and for the first years of operation and have a viable sustainable model for the next five years?

- The applicant is reliant on John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. for startup costs and deficit coverage through year three without a clearly defined contract in place outlining the obligations of either party.

Does the Financial Plan support the vision and mission of the school?

- The Financial plan lacks clear connections to the mission and vision of the proposed charter school.
- The budget did not indicate separate funds for the summer program.

### **E. Education Services Providers**

John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. is designated as the Education Service Provider (ESP), but no service contract was provided. Through questions asked during the interview, the development team stated that John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. will provide financial resources, Human Resources (HR), safety coordination, training, clinical and special education services along with \$60,000 in startup funds. Given that there was no ESP agreement or draft contract to review, the Review Team has no assurances that the agreement will be in the best interests of the charter school or its students.

Given the lack of a clear contract in the application, evaluation criteria in the ESP section could not be addressed. It is a requirement that the service agreement or final draft be included in the application. Although the application does contain a letter from John F. Murphy Homes,

Inc., describing financial support, there is no further documentation of an ongoing relationship between ACADIA Academy and John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. after the initial startup year of operation. The Review Team found the descriptor inadequate to determine the appropriateness of the agreement for operating a successful public charter school.

### **ACADIA Academy Review Team Summary Statement**

The review Team of Nichi Farnham, Chair, Laurie Pendleton, and Shelley Reed conducted a thorough review of the ACADIA Academy application to open a public charter school in the State of Maine. Maine Department of Education Consultant for Students with Disabilities, Peg Armstrong and Early Childhood Consultant, Susan Reed, provided subject area expertise for the review of the application. The Interview with the Governing Board and Development Team of ACADIA Academy was held on September 26, 2014.

The Review Team's recommendation is that the ACADIA Academy application not move forward for further consideration by the Commission for the following reasons:

- The Review Team unanimously agrees that we do not have the confidence that the applicant has met the requirements of the RFP to create a successful, sustainable, high-quality public charter school.
- John F. Murphy Homes was designated as an Education Service Provider (ESP). However, a contract detailing this relationship was not included in the application. Therefore, the Review Team was not able to determine the effectiveness of this relationship.

### **A. Education Plan**

- The selected curriculum and instructional delivery are not innovative.
- The Review team is concerned that the school's selected curriculum and connection with the MMCC may compromise their ability to educate students with special needs in the least restrictive environment.
- The school did not describe how it would use assessment information to modify the educational program and improve instruction, student learning and staff development.
- The program described for Pre-K students was not integrated and is not suitable to the needs of these students.
- Two key components of the program, "Individualized Learning Plans" and "Choice Study Units" were not fully described so it is difficult to determine their educational merit.
- The proposal did not describe a vision for what the school would look like in five to ten years.



## **B. Organizational Plan**

- There is concern that the student recruitment and marketing plan may not result in a diverse student population.
- The plan lacks a comprehensive teacher recruitment and retention plan and the teacher evaluation plan is not aligned to Maine's expectations for teacher evaluation.
- The start-up and pre-opening plans lack necessary details.
- The plans for parent and community involvement are limited.

## **C. Governance**

- The role of the Board in evaluating the program and the school's leadership was not presented.
- The plan did not provide evidence that the Board would be a functioning, independent entity.
- The current Board lacks the experience necessary to run an independent, public charter school.
- The job descriptions of the school's leadership are not clearly defined.
- The proposed director's current and ongoing employment with the MMCC brings into question their ability to independently manage ACADIA Academy.
- ACADIA Academy is entwined with MMCC and John F. Murphy Homes Inc. They are dependent on them for leadership, staff, professional development, legal, and financial expertise.

## **D. Business and Financial Services**

- The applicant is reliant on John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. for startup costs and deficit coverage through year three without a clearly defined contract in place outlining the obligations of either party.
- The school relationship with John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. brings into question the delineation of roles and responsibilities regarding school finance.
- Transportation and school lunch plans do not describe how they would support the needs of all students.
- The plans in the event of a closure of the school are underdeveloped.

## **F. Education Service Providers**

- John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. is designated as the Education Service Provider (ESP) but no service contract was provided. Given that there was no ESP agreement or draft contract to review, the Review Team has no assurances that the agreement will be in the best interests of the charter school or its students.